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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 CARACAS 001449

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SUBJECT: BOLIVARIANS IN THE OLD COUNTRY: CHAVEZ DOES EUROPE

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[1](#)B. WELLS/GENNATIEMPO EMAIL 05/19/06

[1](#)C. VIENNA 01419

[1](#)D. LONDON 03371

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Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(b).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) President Hugo Chavez conducted an array of state business and outreach to sympathizers during a six-country swing through Europe and North Africa, May 10-18. The trip began with Chavez getting a stern message on human rights from Pope Benedict XVI. In Rome, Chavez met with communist Italian legislators but did not meet President-elect Napolitano as had been previously announced. In Austria, Chavez heard some stinging words on the need for open markets during the EU-LatAm Summit but got his own licks in on capitalism at the parallel "People's Summit." Visiting London at the invitation of Mayor Ken Livingstone (and not PM Tony Blair), Chavez attended a series of press conferences, an academic forum, and various rallies. Moving on to Africa, Chavez met with Algerian President Bouteflika, followed by a stopover to meet President Qadhafi in Libya, which one day earlier had been removed from the USG's state sponsor of terrorism list. Chavez' message, as usual, was anti-U.S., anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist. At nearly every stop he offered funding (including heating oil for poor Europeans) or signed vague cooperation agreements. There was plenty of Bolivarian-financed hoopla for Chavez to feel loved, leaving us doubting Chavez will realize that the serious interlocutors and media on his agenda were taking a tougher line with him than in the past. End summary.

¶2. (C) Chavez' trip began with a visit to Pope Benedict XVI on May 11. The trip had been scheduled for last year's European tour, but the pope's schedule was not agreeable. Press reports and ref a say that the pontiff expressed concern to Chavez over state reforms in Venezuela, the status of religious education, the importance of continued Catholic mass media, and the need for more cooperation on the appointment of bishops. The pope then took the highly unusual step of presenting Chavez with a letter re-stating these concerns. After the meeting, Chavez and the Bolivarian propaganda machine spun the meeting as a new high in Venezuelan church-state relations.

When In Rome, Blame The Empire

¶3. (U) While in Rome, Chavez met with Refounded Communist Party leader Fausto Bertinotti and a group of 40 other persons, according to press reports. Chavez also held an exhaustive press conference in which he plodded through explanations of Venezuela's recent international spats, promising that he would fix things up with Peru and Mexico once their current presidents had left office. He attributed Venezuela's international conflicts to "orders from the Empire." There was also an early official media report that Chavez would meet with President Giorgio Napolitano, but there was no subsequent mention of it. Embassy Rome reported that Chavez also sought a meeting with PM Romano Prodi but did not receive it.

Austria: EU-Latam Summit and Counter-Summit

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¶4. (U) At the IV European Union-Latin American Summit May 10-12, international press played up the pro-market, anti-populist statements by European and Latin American leaders, clearly intended for Chavez and Bolivian President Evo Morales. Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel spoke of the developing countries having two possibilities: either wanting open markets or not wanting them (ref b). Open markets perform better, Schuessel concluded. Mexican President Vicente Fox, who has a habit of sparring with Chavez at summits, attacked Chavez' populism, calling it a "false exit from poverty." Peru's Alejandro Toledo played off the point, calling populism a great party overnight but a great headache in the morning. Chavez told reporters there that Latin American leftists were rising up in peace, not with rifles in hand, and that Europe ought to listen and support them.

¶5. (U) Shedding the subdued tones of summitry, Chavez also spoke at an "alternate summit" of some 3,500 youth leaders of socialist groups organized by the "Hands Off Venezuela" movement. Arriving three-and-a-half hours late, Chavez said Venezuela and Cuba would not be scared by U.S. military maneuvers in the Caribbean (a reference to the USS George Washington). Chavez spoke of the eventual overthrow of "the Empire" through the weapon of public opinion. "Every pig has his Saturday," Chavez said in reference to the USG, using a Caribbean variation of "what goes around comes around." His speech was classic Chavez, replete with quotations of Sartre and sung lyrics by John Lennon. He also shared the stage with the daughter of Che Guevara and "Chavez Code" author Eva Gollinger. Even the "Uh! Ah! Chavez no se va!" chant was borrowed for the occasion. On the Internet, "Hands Off" organizers thanked Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (BRV) officials profusely for help in organizing the event, the including Bolivarian Peoples' Congress (a BRV-financed international movement), suggesting the BRV was heavily

involved in setting up the rally.

London: Red Ken But Not Blair

¶6. (U) Chavez stopped in London May 14-15 at the personal invitation of London Mayor Ken Livingstone, a left-wing member of the Labour Party. Chavez, however, had no interaction with PM Tony Blair or HMG officials (ref c). Livingstone hosted Chavez for a speech and joint press conference. The Bolivarian gentleman's thin-skinned nature was much in evidence; when a reporter formulated a question comparing Chavez to President Bush, Chavez exploded on her, saying he had never been so insulted. Another reporter, querying why Chavez didn't get to meet Blair or the Queen, as he had done in a 2001 visit, was upbraided for asking a "stupid question." Chavez also spoke at a meeting of the Trades Union Congress, where he reminded Britons that Venezuelan forefather Francisco de Miranda had once been exiled to England. Later, Chavez spoke to an audience that included several Labour MPs at the House of Commons. Chavez impugned Blair's Third Way, stating that there is no third way between socialism and capitalism and that humanity can only move forward via socialism.

North Africa: Algeria and Libya

¶7. (U) Government sources said that Chavez would sign an energy cooperation agreement with Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika on May 16, though it was not clear whether it took place. Opposition press reported that Chavez remained unexpectedly overnight in Algiers for a second meeting with Bouteflika. Later, Chavez proceeded to Libya to

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meet with President Mohamar Qadhafi. The visit to Tripoli came coincidentally on the heels of Libya's removal from the state sponsor of terrorism list and Venezuela's addition as not fully cooperative in the war on terrorism. Nevertheless, Chavez announced upon leaving his first meeting with Qadhafi that he had called on Libya and the rest of the world to take a united stand against U.S. hegemony. Both in Algeria and Libya Chavez discussed natural gas cooperation.

Chavez' Mega-Talkers

¶8. (U) All told, Chavez probably spoke to press and audiences for nearly 20 hours during his trip. Messages did not appear overly tailored to specific audiences. The key themes were:

-- The United States is an empire that has over-reached in Iraq, the Vietnam of the 21st Century. Venezuela is leading a new multi-polar movement to resist the United States. The end is near for the United States.

-- High oil prices are the fault of the U.S. President. "Every time Bush opens his mouth, the price of oil goes up." A U.S. attack on Iran is imminent and it will drive oil above \$100.

-- All countries have a right to develop peaceful nuclear technology. No country or organization may deny the sovereign right of countries to develop such technology. Iran is not developing nuclear weapons.

-- In Latin America, there is a new system of integration forming based on the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) and "People's Trade Agreements," based on "complementarity" instead of competition. The Andean Community is dead. Energy will be the basis of this new integration, as demonstrated by Petroamerica.

"Boliverables"

¶9. (U) At every stop, the Bolivarians either promised assistance, announced they would be receiving help in Venezuela, or signed vague agreements that were not released to the public. What follows is Post's tally, though it is not exhaustive:

-- Italian Industrial Power in Venezuela. The Venezuelan Ambassador to Italy announced that five projects for "endogenous industrial centers" were on the boards, with the support of unnamed Italian companies.

-- Free Fuel for Poor Europeans. Chavez offered Livingstone a CITGO-esque deal whereby poor Londoners would receive discounted or free heating fuel. He made a similar offer in Vienna to "Europe's most poor."

-- Social Fund in the UK. Chavez said he had just "completed the idea" for a social fund that would be financed with microcredits from wheat, wine, and fruit exports to Venezuela. He gave orders publicly for his people to speak with Venezuela's Finnish partners in two refineries in England. Chavez also pitched a "People's Trade Agreement" with city of London.

-- Commercial Treaty with Austria. Vice Foreign Minister Jenny Figueredo announced progress but no signature on an economic, commercial, environmental, industrial, and technological agreement with Austria.

-- Skyride for Caracas. Chavez said he had reached an agreement with Austria on a joint project for cable cars

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("telefericos") in Caracas' poor neighborhoods.

-- Chile in the Pipeline. In a side meeting in Austria with Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, Chavez offered Chile natural gas via the proposed 8,000-km natural gas pipeline from Venezuela to the rest of the continent.

-- Agreements With Algeria. Advance reports said Chavez would sign agreements on maritime transportation and diplomatic exchanges, though there was no confirmation that this occurred.

-- Something With Libya. The Libyan Foreign Minister said an education and culture agreement had been contemplated, but in the end only an "agreement of general cooperation" was signed with no other details offered.

Comment

¶10. (C) This trip carried positives and negatives for Chavez. On the upside, Chavez probably got more attention as a world leader -- albeit a somewhat infamous one -- than on any other previous trip. He was thronged by people and press wherever he went, though we must discount much of this attention as largely BRV-sponsored. Press coverage, too, is tricky because many journalists are just looking for the one or two sensational quotes that Chavez is guaranteed to deliver during his sleep-inducing marathon press conferences. On the downside for Chavez, however, is the seemingly growing preoccupation expressed by more serious world leaders over Chavez' antics, including none other than the pope. We noticed as well that press coverage was not the romantic doting that he normally garners from people not familiar with Venezuela's political scene -- probably not helped by Chavez' verbally abusing reporters like in London. We expect, however, that this distinction will be lost on Chavez and he

will be encouraged in his man-of-destiny meddling in regional and world affairs.

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